IVORY





In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful and Compassionate





IVORY

8th to 17th centuries

Treasures from the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar

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The National Council for Culture,
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FOREWORD

Ivory is one of the most beautiful of all natural substances. Not only is it dense and heavy with a lustrous texture and subtle rich colour, but its fine grain is able to take detailed carving or simply a beautiful polish. For millennia its qualities have been appreciated, and it has been used for luxury objects in all quarters of the globe where trade has taken the elephant tusk from India and Africa. The tusk places natural limits on the size of ivory objects, and it tends to be used for small items – often boxes, gaming pieces and small implements – or for decorative inlay into larger pieces of furniture or architectural decoration. The Islamic world was as enthusiastic as any for ivory, and had the added advantage of proximity to its sources of supply, which it often controlled.

The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha is privileged to hold an important group of ivories of medieval date – from early monumental chess pieces, to a carved box from Spain and a series of boxes from Sicily, a country sometimes under Islamic rule and always under Islamic influence. The widespread love and use of ivory over many centuries and continents gives rise to some puzzles of attribution. For example, the extraordinary table presented here has had dates suggested for it by the experts that range from the pre-Islamic ancient world to recent times.

The exhibition and this accompanying publication give us the chance of sharing the beauties of the material and the treasures of the Museum of Islamic Art with a wider audience, prior to the opening of the new Museum planned for 2006, where this collection will find a permanent home.

Sheikh Saud bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani
President
The National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage

INTRODUCTION

For millennia, ivory has been valued as much for its preciousness as a luxury commodity as for the beauty of its physical appearance. As a material, it is relatively soft and therefore easy to work into complex decorative schemes, though even the simplest decoration against an uncarved surface can look beautiful. The selection presented here, from the collection of ivories from the Islamic world now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, represents styles and traditions of ivory carving from one of the earliest periods of Islamic art history up to the early modern day. The large quantity of ivories that survive from the periphery of the Islamic Mediterranean reflects the huge importance of the influence of Islamic art on the art and culture of medieval Europe, particularly as mediated through the Norman world.

Ivory industries tend to be concentrated in those regions where there is a ready supply of raw material and, since elephant ivory was favoured in the Islamic world, the two main centres were the Indian world, and Africa and the Mediterranean.[1] In the medieval period, luxury objects made from ivory were produced at centres around the Mediterranean littoral, in the Byzantine Empire, in Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Spain, Sicily and southern Italy. The raw ivory probably originated in West Africa, and the supply was controlled by whichever ruling power had gained the political upper hand at a particular period – during the tenth century, this control fluctuated between the Umayyads of al-Andalus and the Fāṭimid rulers of Egypt, who fought a long territorial dispute in North Africa.[2] It is clear that less raw material was available in the Byzantine world than in al-Andalus or Fāṭimid Egypt at the same period,[3] and the industry attributed to Sicily and southern Italy – which produced by far the greatest number of ivories to survive from any single production centre in the Mediterranean – can only have been as prolific as it was due to the close relationship between the Norman rulers and their Fāṭimid counterparts.[4] In consequence, the carving of ivory became an art of power, with centres competing against each other in the excellence and even abundance of their products.[5] Nevertheless, these centres were dependent on each other, and even in times of conflict, trade and diplomatic relations continued between all the royal courts of the medieval Mediterranean, allowing for a fairly free circulation of raw material.

The use of elephant ivory imposes certain restrictions of size and shape on the objects that can be produced. The tusks of African elephants are on average larger than those of Asian elephants, and can measure up to two metres in length and eighteen centimetres in diameter.[6] Since the top third of a tusk is conically hollow, it is well suited to the




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creation of cylindrical containers such as oliphants (cat. nos 7, 8) or pyxides (cat. nos 2, 6), while the bottom two-thirds (nearest the tip) can be turned into solid cylindrical forms such as chess pieces (cat. nos 3, 4), or rectangular caskets excavated from a solid block of ivory (cat. no. 10). This last technique is the most expensive, as it wastes material, but it fits into a category of conspicuous consumption that would have appealed to the elite patrons of ivory objects. Another production technique is to use strips of tusk to produce long flat plaques, which are then attached to a wooden core, as in two objects illustrated here: a large casket (cat. no. 9) and a Mughal table (cat. no. 12), where the plaques are held in place by metal nails. Alternatively, the plaques may be fastened together with ivory pegs and supported externally by metal mounts, as in the majority of the ivories attributed to Sicilian manufacture (cat. no. 5). It is significant for the understanding of ivory as a prestige material that a Sicilian metal casket in Doha imitates the form of ivory caskets, rather than the other way around.[7] At a later period, when supplies of raw material were less abundant, the use of ivory and often bone in inlaid decoration became popular, particularly under the Mamlūks (cat. no. 11), though the technique of affixing ivory plaques to wooden furniture existed from a much earlier period (cat. no. 1).

Ivory objects were made for patrons in the highest echelons of medieval society. Of the more than thirty surviving ivories from al-Andalus, eighteen have inscriptions that run around the base of their lids. These inscriptions generally give the name of the object's patron as well as the date and sometimes the place of manufacture. Eleven of the Andalusī ivories are dateable to the period of the first two Spanish-Umayyad caliphs (mid- to late tenth century), and eight of these were made for the highest levels of the ruling family. Two even state that they were made in ateliers at Madīnat al-Zahrā', the caliphal palace-city.[8] The Andalusī ivory in the Doha collection (cat. no. 10) does not name its patron, but we can be sure that it was made for a member of elite society with access to the patronage structures of the ivory industry, which, at the start of the eleventh century, was being controlled by the ʿĀmirid regency government. Though little is known about the patronage of the many ivories to survive from Sicily and southern Italy, we can presume that they were the result of widespread admiration among the Norman nobility for the Islamic aesthetic perpetuated in royal foundations such as the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.[9]

The decoration of the Sicilian ivories employs a distinctive repertoire, drawing on motifs common among the ceiling paintings of the Cappella Palatina – such as seated drinkers,[10] musicians,[11] and dancers with long-flowing sleeves in the Fāṭimid style.[12]



5 6 7 8

Other common motifs are falconers on horseback, and representations of royal animals, such as lions and peacocks. All these themes are common in the art of contemporary al-Andalus and Fāṭimid Egypt,[13] and several of them occur on the penbox here (cat. no. 10). Some of the painted ivories are decorated with Christian religious motifs, most commonly depictions of saints,[14] and a number of ivory combs and crosiers survive with decoration that can be associated with other examples of Sicilian production.[15] We should not forget that an important source of patronage in the Christian world was the Church – many of the ivories surviving from the Byzantine world, for example, were made for liturgical use.[16]

In the Islamic world, by contrast, all the evidence points to an entirely secular function for the surviving ivories. One pyxis, now in the Hispanic Society of America, New York, bears a poetic inscription that beautifully describes the form and decoration of these cylindrical caskets, and identifies their function as containers for luxury commodities which were used in the making of perfumes and cosmetics.[17] Musk, camphor and ambergris were imported at very high cost from the other ends of the world, and were considered in Islamic Spain to be amongst the most luxurious and generous of gifts.[18] One historical source recounts a magnificent diplomatic gift sent by the caliph ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III to an ally, which included nine luxury perfume containers made of 'white ivory ... with silver hinges'.[19] Equally, these caskets could have been used for storing jewels or other precious possessions and, as we have seen, were gifts themselves, leading one scholar to describe them as 'expensive wrapping paper'.[20] The function of the chess pieces is nothing if not secular, and again signifies the high class of ownership, skilled in the 'game of kings'. The Sicilian origin of the two chess pieces illustrated here (cat. nos 3, 4) further demonstrates the strong influence of Islamic culture on Norman society, since chess spread to Europe as a direct result of the Arab conquests.[21]

The Doha collection offers a cross-section of ivory-carving from different cultures and different times. They are linked by their relation to the Islamic world, and are decorated in a variety of styles, from simple incised patterns to painted designs, inlaid intarsia and highly complex figural carving. A number of these objects have also undergone decorative modifications in later periods, such as the glass inkwells added at one time to the penbox (cat. no. 10), probably in the nineteenth century. These objects were not only the precious possessions of the patrons for whom they were originally made, but have been preserved over the centuries and to the present day as highly valued examples of a uniquely beautiful art form.



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10



11

FRANCE
Venice
Black Sea
ITALY
SPAIN
Istanbul
Toledo
Amalfi
GREECE
Cordoba
TURKEY
Palermo
Madinat al-Zahra
SICILY
Mediterranean Sea
SYRIA
Damascus
Samarra
Fez
Baghdad
LEBANON
Ctesiphon
MOROCCO
Jerusalem
Mshatta
IRAQ
JORDAN
Cairo
KUWAIT
ALGERIA
EGYPT
QATAR
Doha
INDIA
MAURITANIA



12

Two fragmentary ivory panels, each formed of a short length of elephant tusk retaining the natural curve, and carved in deep relief on one side. The decoration is of vine scrolls consisting of five-lobed leaves, the lobes separated by deep drill-holes, with occasional highly stylized bunches of grapes at the junctions of the stalk and scroll.

These two panels belong to a small group which comprises the very earliest extant Islamic ivories.[22] Several more such panels exist, as well as three caskets that share a distinctive cylindrical form. All these pieces can be related through the design they share, of scrolling foliage containing large, lobed vine leaves, often with bunches of grapes and occasionally with small birds who peck at the fruit. This form of decoration is inherited from the traditions of the classical and late antique Mediterranean, and reflects the profound artistic influence which the classical world had on the first centuries of Islam. Rows of scrolling tendrils issuing from amphora-like vases appear in the mosaic decoration around the central drum of the Dome of the Rock, built in 692 AD,[23] while one of the first appearances of this motif in three-dimensional form was on the carved marble facade of the Umayyad palace at Mshatta, in present-day Jordan, constructed circa 744.[24]

In both these cases (though less so in the mosaics), the style is still highly naturalistic, and has not yet evolved into the abstract vegetal forms that characterize the stucco decoration of the ʿAbbāsid palaces at Samarra, the construction of which began in the 830s. The form of the leaves on these ivories can be compared to what Creswell called Samarran 'style A' – the earliest phase, when the vegetal forms were at their least abstract; this style appears already fully developed in the decoration of the massive palace, the Jawsaq al-Khāqanī, which was the first structure to be built at Samarra.[25] The style must therefore have evolved during the ninety years separating Mshatta from the Jawsaq al-Khāqani.

Most panels that survive are much flatter than these two pieces; however, like them, they have large holes along the edges, suggesting that they were fixed with nails onto another structure, as applied decoration on doors or furniture. These were most probably of wood, which is less likely to survive than ivory, and would prefigure the later tradition of covering the surface of doors and furniture with decorative panels of carved wood and ivory.[26]

Syria or Iraq
Late 8th to early 9th century
Left fragment: *length* 18.5 cm, *width* 7 cm, *breadth* 3.5 cm, *weight* 279 grams
Right fragment: *length* 18.5 cm, *width* 5.5 cm, *breadth* 2.1 cm, *weight* 132 grams
IV.15.99



Left fragment
Side view







Left fragment
Detail

Right fragment
Detail



Ivory pyxis (with later silver mounts) decorated with incised cruciform and anthropomorphic motifs infilled with red-coloured mastic.

This small pyxis has simple but attractive decoration, formed by building up patterns based on the repeat unit of an incised dot within a circle. These incised patterns were infilled with thin layers of a bright red-coloured mastic, or resinous substance combined with a natural pigment,[27] which creates quite a contrast with the pale material of the ivory. It is interesting to note that the colour of the mastic is slightly darker on the lid than it is on the sides, and in fact the colour of the ivory lid is somewhat paler than the body of the pyxis. This discolouration may have resulted from the flat lid of the object being bleached by light over time, and from dirt settling into the details; it may also indicate that the lid, which was probably lifted by its handle, was handled less than the sides. The sides would have absorbed oil from the hands, and the ivory would consequently have become darkened.[28]

The decorative technique on this object is identical to that used on the two chess pieces that follow. The cruciform designs used here also recur on the chess pieces, though the motif that appears twice on the body of this pyxis is more elaborately executed. While the use of a cross design does not necessarily symbolize anything more than a pleasingly symmetrical pattern – and one which evolves naturally from the layering of repeating circles – it is possible that in this case it reflects the object's function. The word 'pyxis' derives from 'pyx', a Christian ecclesiastical term used to describe the often small cylindrical vessels in which the consecrated bread of the Eucharist was stored. Perhaps this was the original function of this small container.

The cruciform motifs alternate with an unusual anthropomorphic design which, interestingly, was conceived to mask a crack in the ivory. For the sake of symmetry, the design was echoed on the other side. This indicates the value of ivory as a raw material – despite a rather severe crack, the craftsman still judged the material precious enough not to discard, and to adorn with decoration. The very thin walls of all the surviving Sicilian ivories demonstrate the craftsmen's skill at maximizing the use of the material available to them – a material whose import relied on sometimes fragile commercial ties with the Islamic world.[29]

Sicily
Late 11th to 12th century
Height 7 cm, *diameter* 8.4 cm
(9 cm including mounts)
IV.08.98





3 IVORY CHESS PIECE (KING)

A solid ivory chess piece, formed from a cross-section of tusk. It represents the 'king', as its form is an abstract representation of a throne. The decoration consists of patterns based on circle-and-dot units, with two cruciform motifs on the top, and also originally on the front and back sides, though these have worn off almost completely. Around the base a band of incised concentric circles, infilled with coloured mastic (black round the base, red at the sides).

This is a beautiful example from a small group of solid ivory chess pieces that are decorated with circle-and-dot patterning. About twelve of these pieces are dispersed through museum collections across the globe, though presumably more are yet to come to light.[30] They are characterized by an abstract – rather than a figural – form, and are usually attributed to Fāṭimid Egypt, on the basis of comparison with another famous group of abstract chess pieces. These are the many surviving rock crystal chess pieces, such as those in the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyyah in Kuwait; the stylistic relationship of these pieces to the 'bevelled style' of Ṭūlūnid and early Fāṭimid art does seem to suggest a tenth-century dating and an Egyptian provenance.[31] Our ivory pieces share the same forms for king, knight and bishop as the rock crystal sets, and the decorative technique used – of incised circle-and-dot patterning with a colour infill – was probably developed in Egypt.[32]

However, there is actually more reason to attribute this group of ivory chess pieces to Sicily, to the same ivory industry that produced the more than two hundred surviving caskets with painted decoration. A key piece in establishing this is an oval casket with a domed cover in the Treasury at York Minster in England, which has incised and infilled decoration identical to that on some of the chess pieces, including a particular motif of a stylized tree;[33] another casket identical in size and shape to the York casket, which is in the Diocesan Museum in Trento, northern Italy, has both incised and painted decoration.[34] Moreover, a few rectangular caskets are known; the forms of these caskets are common among the group of painted caskets, and their decoration is either solely incised or a combination of incised and painted.[35]

This evidence indicates beyond doubt that this type of incised and infilled decoration must be coeval with the painted caskets and, furthermore, that it must have been produced in the same context. It is interesting to note that one of the incised ivory chess pieces in the British Museum was actually acquired in Sicily, in the late nineteenth century.[36] The fact that their abstract forms are so close to the style of Islamic chess sets demonstrates another of the many influences of Fāṭimid Egypt on the art of Norman Sicily.

Sicily
Late 11th to 12th century
Height 7.9 cm, *diameter* 8.4 cm,
weight 747 grams
IV.25.00









A solid ivory chess piece, formed from a cross-section of tusk. It represents the 'bishop' (*fīl* in the Islamic game of chess), as its form is an abstract representation of an elephant, with two protuberances evoking tusks. The decoration consists of patterns based on circle-and-dot units, with a simple cruciform motif at the top, and three on the body – one at the back, and two flanking the 'tusks'. Around the base a continuous band of incised concentric circles, infilled with coloured mastic (black round the base, red at the sides).

This attractive chess piece belongs to the same group of solid ivory pieces with incised decoration as the previous object.[37] The stylistic similarities shared by the pieces that comprise this group lead one to wonder whether they belonged to one set; however, they all have differing relative dimensions, and enough kings survive for at least three sets.

Nevertheless, this raises an interesting issue: in the modern game of chess, we are used to playing with two opposing sides known as 'black' and 'white'. During the period from which our pieces date, chess was played exclusively in royal and noble circles, and consequently chess sets were made from luxury materials, such as ivory and rock crystal.[38] A passage in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* – an inventory of the famous Fāṭimid palace treasuries, which includes an eye-witness account of the objects that were looted from the palace during a political crisis in the mid-eleventh century – mentions chess sets made of all kinds of gems and semi-precious stones, as well as gold and silver, ivory and ebony.[39] This description would imply that the different sides within a chess set were made from contrasting materials; however, the patterns of survival of chess sets from the medieval Mediterranean world suggest a different means for distinguishing sides. For example, large numbers of rock crystal chess pieces are known, which – because of the nature of the material – have no colour.[40] Perhaps it was their decoration that distinguished them from each other. In the case of our ivory group, it may be that the distinction depended on the use of different patterns, or of differently coloured mastic in the infill. Indeed a skilled chess player today does not need to have his pieces distinguished by colour, but rather knows them by their position on the board.

Chess was the most popular indoor game in ʿAbbāsid Baghdad, and its spread to the Levant, the Maghreb, the Byzantine Empire and northern Europe was a direct result of the Islamic conquests.[41] The use of the abstract form of chess pieces in Norman Sicily shows the intimate relationship its rulers had with the Islamic world, and represents the phase just before the development in Europe of figural chess sets (in the later twelfth century), which are exemplified so beautifully by the Lewis chessmen.[42]

Sicily
Late 11th to 12th century
Height 8.5 cm, *diameter* 7.6 cm,
weight 610 grams
IV.05.98









Rectangular casket formed of plain ivory plaques fastened together with pegs, ornamented with painted and gilded decoration of birds and vegetal roundels, with the original copper gilt mounts.

This casket is a fine example from a group of more than two hundred ivory caskets with painted decoration, the production of which has been attributed to Sicily in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[43] Since it takes far less time to paint a design on a casket than it does to carve one, this group has a more mass-produced style than the carved ivories known from al-Andalus or southern Italy, of which, consequently, far fewer survive. The painted ivories were designed in order to maximize the amount of raw material available, which would have been African elephant ivory that came to Sicily via commercial routes controlled by the Fāṭimid rulers of Egypt. The rectangular caskets were formed by joining very thin walls of ivory together by means of ivory pegs, and only the largest were constructed around a wooden framework.[44] As a result the caskets made in this technique are very light and fragile, so copper gilt mounts were used to add extra support. The majority of the mounts and lock-plates seen today on these caskets are the originals.[45]

The decoration of this casket conforms to the standard repertoire for this group, with the painting in red, green and gold leaf, and outlines in a dark grey. The decoration is either located inside roundels or floats free, with the most common motifs being heart-shaped 'arabesques', and animals such as antelopes, spotted leopards and, above all, birds. Human figures are also popular, especially hunters on horseback, seated musicians and dancers with flowing sleeves in the style known from Fāṭimid lustre pottery and the paintings of the Cappella Palatina ceiling in Palermo.[46] On the slightly later pieces, Christian iconography, such as the depiction of saints, becomes common. Many of the caskets also have inscriptions in Arabic, which contain blessings and occasionally particular verses on the theme of love from the *Thousand and One Nights*[47] – it is likely that such caskets were given as marriage gifts.[48] These ivories were probably produced for members of the Norman nobility who could afford the luxury materials from which they were manufactured, and who mixed in circles where an Islamic aesthetic was *de rigueur*, as it was under Roger II (1130–1154 AD) and his successors.[49] It would not have been unusual for such nobles to present their precious possessions to churches, where the caskets became reliquaries, which is how they have survived to the present day.

Sicily
12th century
Length 13.3 cm, *width* 8.9 cm,
height 6.4 cm, *weight* 203 grams
IV.03.97





Detail of top







Details of front and back



Cylindrical casket, formed from hollowing out a cross-section of tusk; ornamented with painted and gilded decoration, much of which has since disappeared, with the original copper gilt mounts, lock-plate and feet. The handle and suspension loops at the sides, and the linen lining, are probably also original.

There are four common forms within the wider group of Sicilian painted ivories: long rectangular caskets with a pyramidal lid; small rectangular caskets with a flat lid; oval caskets with a domed lid; and tall cylindrical caskets with a flat lid.[50] Far fewer of this last type survive, no doubt because the shape relies on obtaining a large cross-section of an elephant tusk and completely hollowing it out, which is a technique that wastes a lot of the raw material. If ivory was at a premium in medieval Sicily, such cylindrical caskets as this would have been the height of luxury and conspicuous consumption.

Unfortunately, the original painted design of this pyxis has mostly disappeared, since the pigments used in the decoration of these caskets are vulnerable to wearing down over the centuries. Only traces of outlines in dark grey and areas of gold leaf now survive. However, on comparison with other similar caskets, such as that in the Treasury of St Peter in Salzburg, Austria, which is particularly close to our casket,[51] the traces of a design below the mounts on front and back suggest a tall 'arabesque' tree motif. This motif also occurs on the Reliquary of St Petroc, which was one of the few Sicilian caskets to make its way to England during the medieval period, most probably in 1176–7 when King Henry II's daughter Joan married William II of Sicily.[52]

This comparison assists in the dating of our casket, but it also indicates interesting aspects of the patronage of this ivory group. The St Petroc casket may have been given as a wedding gift by the groom to his future father-in-law, which suggests that such ivory containers together with their Islamic designs were highly valued by the royal house, not least by the king himself. We can be sure that this esteem would have been imitated by noble members of the Norman court, and probably also high officials of the Church, which is why some caskets in the group have very specifically Christian iconography. It is likely that our pyxis was once the highly valued container for a nobleman's precious possessions.

Sicily
Mid- to late 12th century
Height 13 cm (14.1 cm including mounts), *diameter* 12.2 cm, (12.7 cm including mounts)
IV.41.03







Oliphant, octagonally faceted, with wide bands at the mouth and base, the lower band carved with a repeat inscription reading '*al-yumn*' ('good fortune'), and the upper band carved with hunting scenes.

This object belongs to a group of some eighty extant oliphants, ivory hunting horns that were made in Sicily and southern Italy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[53] The oliphant was not an Islamic form – they are not mentioned in texts from the medieval Islamic world nor represented in Islamic art, and none can be traced to a firm Islamic provenance.[54] In contrast, they are commonly mentioned in cathedral inventories of north-west Europe and in *chansons de geste*, poems about the heroic virtues of medieval Christian rulers. Oliphants were taken on hunting expeditions, and the use of mainly hunting scenes in their iconography appropriately reflects this function – the decoration of this horn combines several different models for representing hunters that were employed widely in medieval Islamic art. These horns were blown through the small hole in the narrow end, to rouse game and signal other hunters, and this hole could be stoppered to form a container for water or wine. As oliphants were impractically heavy, however, their ownership was more about conspicuous display than practical necessity. Narrow bands of ivory were left uncarved for the attachment of carrying straps. On this oliphant, green stains and slightly paler areas below the carved bands indicate that it once bore the additional adornment of metal sheathing.[55]

Though these were fundamentally European objects, their decoration derived entirely from Islamic sources. This is most obvious here in the presence of an Arabic inscription, invoking good fortune to its owner sixteen times – again, an appropriate sentiment in the competitive and potentially dangerous context of the hunt. That this inscription is actually legible suggests that this horn was manufactured in Sicily, where Arabic was one of the languages of the Norman government, alongside Latin and Greek.[56] A Sicilian provenance is also indicated by the motifs carved in the band around the mouth: the peculiar spiky plants that grow in the background illustrate a relationship with the painted Sicilian ivories, where this was a common motif.[57] Similarly the tricorn crown which the archer wears evokes that depicted on the heads of seated rulers in the paintings of the Cappella Palatina ceiling in Palermo – another Christian artwork in Islamic style.[58] This association with the ceiling, which is dated between 1130 and 1143, thus allows us to suggest a date in the mid-twelfth century for the manufacture of this oliphant.

Sicily or southern Italy
Mid-12th century
Length 53 cm,
diameter of mouth 9.8 cm,
diameter of base 2.3 cm,
weight 1356 grams
IV.11.98





Continuous view
of the hunting scenes
carved around
the upper band



Oliphant, with wide bands at the mouth and base containing birds and animals within roundels, and the body divided into vertical bands, featuring combinations of running birds and animals.

Like the previous object, this is one of the group of surviving oliphants; however, it can be most closely related to a group of ivory caskets that were made in southern Italy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This group was dubbed 'Saracenic' by the scholar Ernst Kühnel, because it was strongly influenced by the art of the Islamic Mediterranean, although it was actually made outside of an Islamic environment. This was thus another ivory industry, running in parallel with the Sicilian workshop that made the painted and incised objects, which produced carved ivories in an entirely distinctive aesthetic.[59]

Due to the primarily secular function of the caskets and oliphants manufactured in this Italian workshop, their iconography consists of scenes of the hunt, featuring mainly animals but also human figures, as well as mythical creatures such as griffins, harpies and occasionally unicorns – not a motif used in the repertoire of medieval Islamic art. The animals are always circumscribed within a circular medallion, have characteristically large, rounded bodies, and frequently the tips of their tails are depicted as terminating in a small, secondary head. The way these animals are conceived betrays an intimate dependency on the designs of Fāṭimid lustre pottery, where a similar aesthetic of disproportionately large bodies is common, and where animals' tails frequently terminate in a palmette. Comparisons between particular motifs on the Italian ivories and the Fāṭimid pottery – the harpy, for example – has shown that the ivories imitate details such as the feathering of the body or the position of the creature's feet and head.[60] Even scenes peculiar to Faṭimid lustre pottery – such as the camel-herder depicted on a bowl in the Benaki Museum in Athens – recur on the Italian ivories.[61]

This artistic relationship indicates that the ivories' place of production was one that maintained strong contacts with Fāṭimid Egypt, as did both the Italian maritime states of Amalfi and Venice.[62] The argument for Amalfi is based on the evidence of a writing case in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which bears a Latin inscription naming a member of the Mansone family, who were prominent in Amalfi at this period.[63] The horizontal bands of smaller running animals in the middle zone of our oliphant are very close to the decoration of this writing case, which indicates that they are the products of one workshop.

Italy, Amalfi or Venice
Late 11th to early 12th century
Length 49 cm,
diameter of mouth 10.4 cm,
diameter of base 2.9 cm,
weight 1505 grams
IV.07.99





Continuous view
of the birds and animals
carved around
the upper band



Rectangular casket, formed of ivory plaques attached to a wooden core, the whole surface covered with carved decoration of linked roundels enclosing animals. The plaques seem to have been remounted onto a new wooden core in the modern period.

This casket can be compared with the 'Saracenic' group, of which the previous object is a fine example.[64] It features the same structure of connected roundels containing animals singly or in groups, the interstices of which are filled with stylized leaves and bunches of grapes. The animals are represented in the same manner as on the other caskets in this group, with large rounded bodies and the details of their fur or feathering picked out with lightly incised marks. However, this casket also features some interesting stylistic differences: its shape is unusual, since it has a flat rather than a pyramidal lid (though flat-lidded caskets are common in the painted group); the borders of the roundels are rather thicker than normal; the terminations of the animals' tails do not end in a small head; and though the same types of animals appear, there are subtle differences in their depiction – for example, the heraldic eagles on either side of the back wall are closer to the style in which this bird appears in Byzantine or Andalusī contexts.

Most unusual is the decoration employed in the borders, since this casket does not use the palmette scroll that the other 'Saracenic' pieces have in common, though the border design on the back is a more elaborate version of it, which sees the palmettes developed into stylized grape bunches. However, the band of interlocking birds on the front and the highly complex 'Celtic' knots employed on the two sides are very unusual, and are more evocative of the art of northern Europe. Nevertheless, all these features relate closely to two surviving oliphants, one in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and the second in the British Museum in London.[65] The British Museum oliphant is particularly like our casket, with an identical knotted design in the upper border, serpentine creatures biting their own tails, and paired birds with the same knotted 'bird table' motif in between them.

The stylistic differences between these pieces and the rest of the 'Saracenic' group can probably be explained by the fact that they were produced by a different craftsman or even a different workshop. These may have been working within southern Italy, or even in a more northern context, related through the wide sphere of Norman influence in Europe at this period. Until more is known about this Italian ivory group, the exact place within it of our casket cannot be fully established. It is highly important, however, for the clues it gives of a hybridization of Byzantine, Islamic (especially, perhaps, Andalusī) and Western styles that was developing in the art of the Mediterranean at this period.

Southern Italy
Late 11th to early 12th century
Length 32 cm, *width* 19.2 cm,
height 10.6 cm
IV.12.98







Below
Detail of back

Overleaf
Detail of top









Detail of front





Details of sides



Ivory penbox, of elongated rectangular form with a hinged cover; made from a solid block of ivory, and carved all over with scenes of the hunt and animal combat, with a scene of four mounted horsemen on the cover; an inscription in Kūfic script runs along the base of the lid on the front and back of the casket. Altered, probably in the late nineteenth century, to accommodate glass inkwells, and this is probably when the dark varnish was applied to the whole surface.

INSCRIPTION

[bismillāh al-raḥmān al-...] raḥīm barakah min allāh wa yūmn [sic] *wa saʿādah wa ghibṭah wa surūr wa ʿāfiyah kāfiyah wa niʿmah ṣābıghah* [sic. for *sābighah*] *wa al-āʿaliyāh wa niʿmah muttaṣilah li-ṣāḥibihā* [sic] *mimmā ʿumila fī shahr rabīʿ al-awwal wa dhālik fī sanat arbaʿah wa tisʿīna wa thalā[thi mi'ati sanah] (394).*
[In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the] Compassionate. Blessing from Allāh, and good fortune and happiness and bliss and joy and sufficient health, and abundant and of the highest [i.e. from Allāh] grace, and uninterrupted grace to its owner. This was made in the month of Rabīʿ I which was in the year 1003–4.

This unique penbox belongs to the spectacular group of carved ivories made in Islamic Spain between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries.[66] Some doubts were raised over its authenticity when it appeared on the art market in 1998, due to its shape being unusual within the canon of ivories from al-Andalus, and due to irregularities in the penbox's inscription, such as spelling mistakes, the use of the full *basmala* and the presence of a month in the date.[67] However, mistakes are not uncommon in medieval Islamic inscriptions, and the other features can be seen on several other objects from early eleventh-century Spain.[68] Nevertheless, to allay these doubts, samples taken from the base and lid were subjected to radiocarbon analysis, which dated the ivory from which the penbox is made to circa 721–894 AD.[69] Interestingly, the tusk was over a hundred years old when it was carved into this penbox, indicating that ivory, even as a raw material, was considered precious and exotic enough to be kept for long periods.

Not all scholars are convinced by the results of this analysis, however, arguing that the object's iconography combines elements from the ivories of the caliphal period in Córdoba with those of a later group, manufactured in the eleventh century under the patronage of the autonomous rulers of Toledo.[70] In fact, this object belongs to a transitional group, which was produced at the turn of the eleventh century, under the patronage of the ʿĀmirids, the regents who governed Córdoba on behalf of the young caliph, Hishām II. The unease of scholars over the iconography stems from the fact that it is only recently that a clear ʿĀmirid context has been established into which to slot this object.[71]

This penbox is therefore a key piece in linking the ivories that survive from the tenth with those from the eleventh century. Though its inscription does not name an owner, it can be ascribed to a group of anonymous commissions that were probably manufactured for an elite, noble market, products of an imitation industry stimulated by the association of ivory with royalty and luxury.[72] It is a beautiful piece that can help us gain a deeper understanding of the society which flourished so briefly and produced such spectacular objects.

Al-Andalus, Islamic Spain
Dated Rabīʿ I 394 AH / December 1003 to January 1004 AD
Length 36.7 cm, *width* 7.1 cm, *height* 4.5 cm, *weight* 1159 grams
IV.04.98













Rectangular mirror composed of steel set in a decorative frame, which is formed of wood of different tones and inlaid with bone, either in natural form or stained green.

This attractive mirror presents a real enigma. It is difficult to find parallels for many of its distinctive decorative elements, the most unusual of which is the 'wheel' motif that occurs six times on the back of the mirror. The closest parallel for this occurs on a Byzantine enamelled and gilded glass bowl in the Treasury of San Marco in Venice, which is usually dated to the tenth to eleventh centuries.[73] Our mirror is not that old, but an eastern Mediterranean provenance for it is likely. It is decorated in a technique known as intarsia, a means of decorating wood in which the design is made by inlaying small, shaped pieces of veneer into a solid ground.[74] The term is Italian, since this was a particularly popular technique for decorating furniture and woodwork in Renaissance Italy, from the fourteenth century on. However, the Italian tradition began by imitating works of art produced in the contemporary Mamlūk world. In fact, it is now often difficult to distinguish Italian from Mamlūk inlaid work: an inlaid games board sold at Sotheby's recently, which was classed as Syrian or Egyptian, fifteenth to sixteenth century,[75] is stylistically close to a games board in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, which is thought to be Italian, sixteenth century.[76]

The micromosaic inlay which forms the border around the steel mirror, and which borders the central decoration of four trefoils on the back, evokes Mamlūk work. However, the trefoils themselves are unusual, as are the bifurcated palmettes which form the main decoration on the front of the mirror, and no direct parallels have yet been found. They bear similarities to the cinquefoil palmettes on the Mamlūk games board mentioned above, but are particularly close to a 'bud' motif that fills the decorative roundels and borders on a fourteenth-century brass table (*kursi*) with silver inlay, in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.[77] The bifurcated palmettes from the front of our mirror evoke the border decoration around the doors of another *kursi* in Cairo, which is dated 728 AH / 1327 AD, though here the parallel is less exact.[78] These comparisons might indicate a date in the early fourteenth century for our mirror, however the use of stained green bone brings us back to the aesthetic of Italian inlaid work of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This might suggest that the Italian style was exported back to the eastern Mediterranean world at this time, where it was incorporated into the local inlay tradition.

Syria or Egypt(?)
15th to 16th century(?)
Height 17 cm, *width* 15 cm,
thickness 0.9–1.0 cm
IV.16.99





Table, formed of plaques of ivory attached to a wooden core by metal nails, ornamented with hemispherical bosses and turned pieces of ivory.

When this remarkable ivory table was the property of the Lebanese collector Henri Pharaon, it was catalogued by Basil Gray as Mamlūk, dating from fourteenth-century Egypt, though he believed the table top to be a later restoration. While Gray admitted there was no close parallel to it known to him, he likened the profile of the turned ivory legs to those on the inlaid brass *kursī* made for al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalawūn, which is dated 728 AH / 1327 AD.[79] The similarity is clear, however the technique of turning ivory in this way is common to many cultures at many different periods, and therefore does not provide the basis for a secure identification. Nevertheless, on the grounds of Gray's attribution of our table, the two almost identical tables in the Dār al-Athār al-Islāmiyyah in Kuwait (LNS 4 I, LNS 65 I) were originally classified as Mamlūk.[80]

As we have seen in the discussion of the previous object, ivory tended to be used by the Mamlūks as a material for inlay, and was often carved, whereas here flat plaques of ivory are fastened with nails to a wooden frame, and it is the arrangement of the plaques themselves which forms the decoration. The only applied decoration is in the form of small incised circle-and-dot motifs, which are arranged in a linear manner to create a simple design along the borders of the table; two diagonal lines run along the surface of the table, and the point of intersection is marked by a large circle. This is as sophisticated as the decoration gets, and there is no attempt to build up a pattern by layering the incised motifs, nor is there any trace of a resinous infill, as on the medieval Sicilian pieces at the beginning of this catalogue (cat. nos 2–4).

It is now thought that an Indian origin is more likely for all three tables. A table very similar to ours, though lower and with a more rectangular shape, can be seen in the foreground of a Mughal miniature painting depicting a scene from the *Bābur-nāme*, dated to circa 1593 (now in the collection of the Musée Guimet in Paris).[81] This demonstrates that such furniture was bring used at the Mughal court by the late sixteenth century. Furthermore, a low square table in a German private collection has been classified as Indian, from the eighteenth century.[82] This table is bigger and more elaborately decorated than the three tables in Qatar and Kuwait, with intricately carved floral decoration around all four sides, and so a slightly later date seems justified.

Mughal India
16th to 17th century
Height 44.5 cm,
table top 41.2 x 41 cm
IV.02.99







Details of top and side

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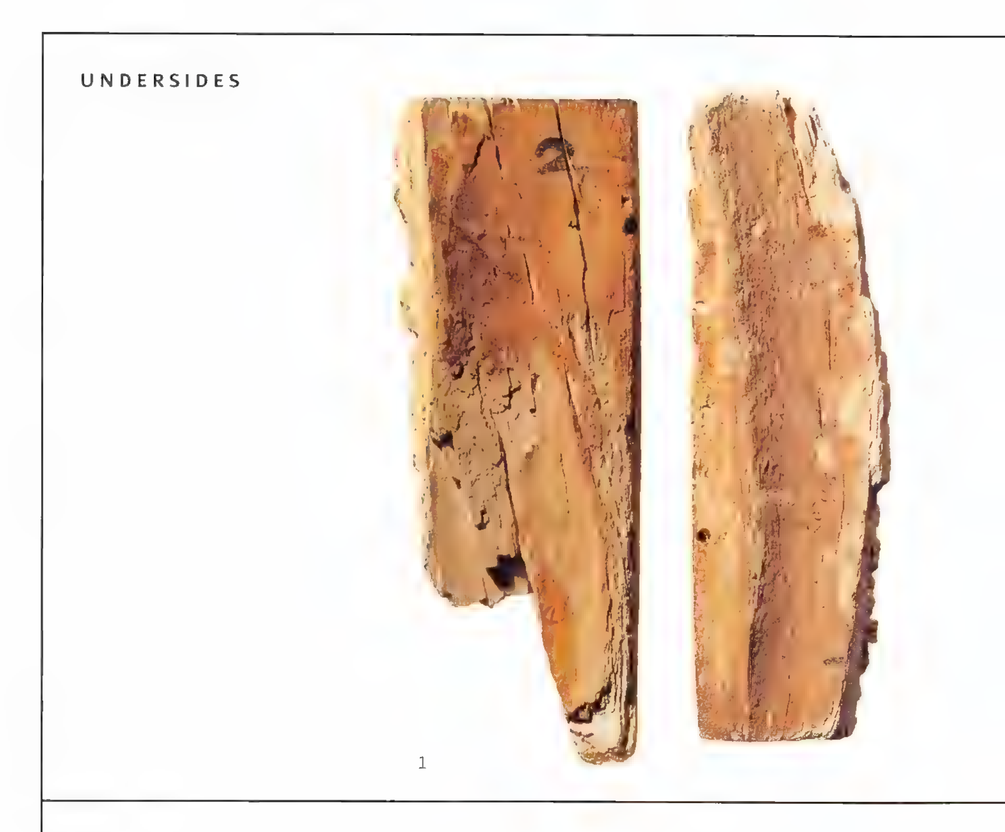
Hussain R. Al-Ismail

Director for Museums & Antiquities

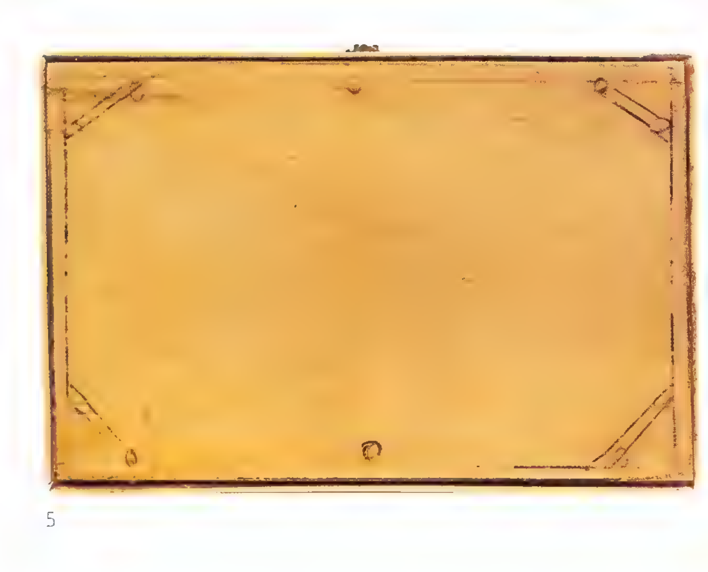
The National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage

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UNDERSIDES



1



5



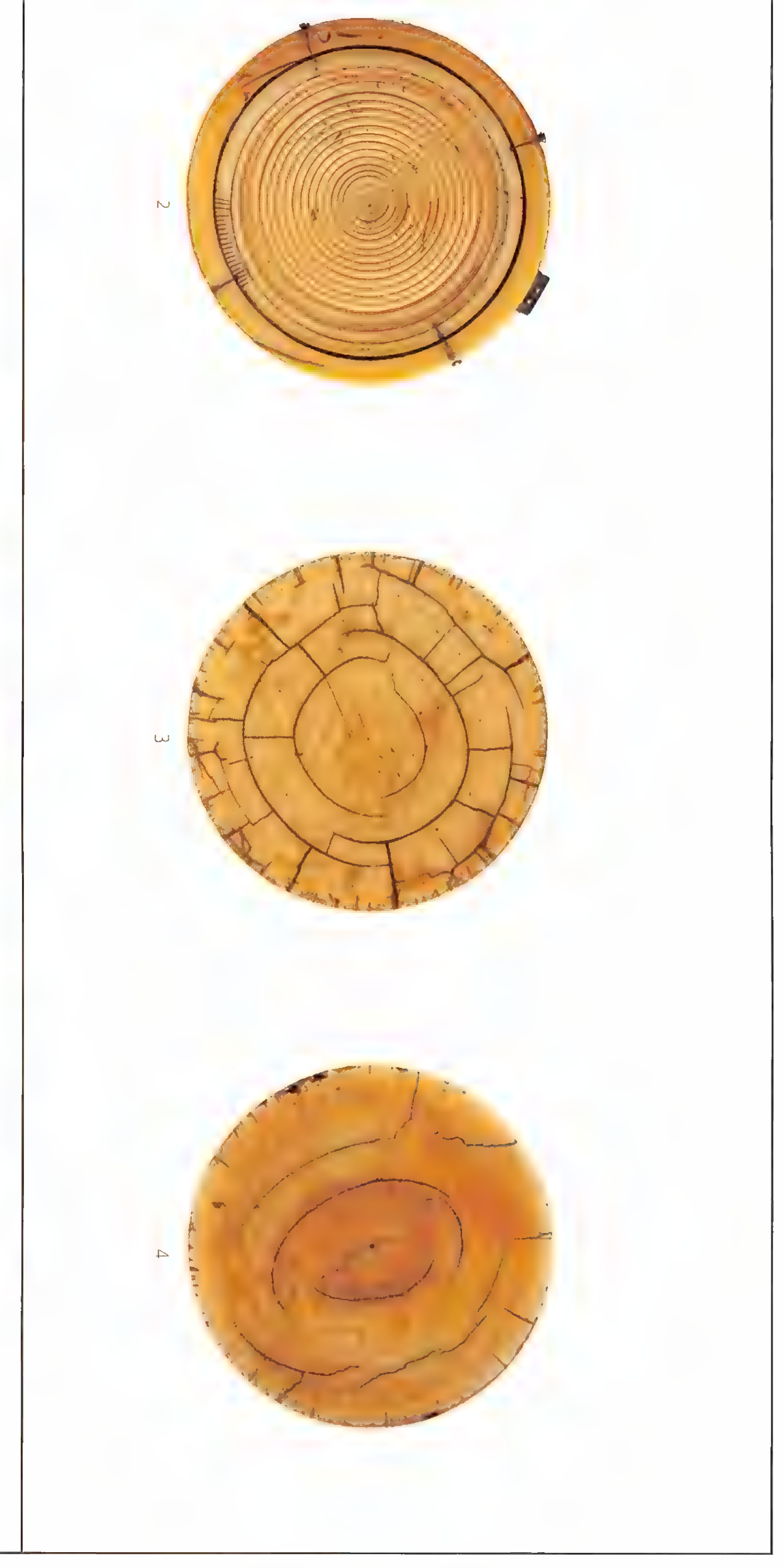
6



10



9



2

3

4

1 PROVENANCE: Humayzi Collection.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Stern, 1954; Künnel, 1971; Creswell, 1989; Piotrovsky and Vrieze, 1999; Johns, 2000; *Museum für Islamische Kunst*, 2001.

2 PUBLISHED: Sotheby's, October 1998, lot 110.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Pinder-Wilson and Brooke, 1973; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Pinder-Wilson, 1985; Al-Hassan and Hill, 1986; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Sotheby's, October 1998.

3 PUBLISHED: Christie's, 2000, lot 318.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Dalton, 1909; Cott, 1939; Kühnel, 1971; Pinder-Wilson and Brooke, 1973; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Jenkins, 1983; Pinder-Wilson, 1985; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Contadini, 1995; Phillips, 1995; Christie's, 2000; *Museum für Islamische Kunst*, 2001; Christie's, 2003.

4 PUBLISHED: Sotheby's, April 1998, lot 1.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Kühnel, 1971; Pinder-Wilson and Brooke, 1973; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Pinder-Wilson, 1985; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Contadini, 1995; Phillips, 1995; Al-Ḥijjāwī, 1996; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996; Sotheby's, April 1998.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Monneret de Villard, 1950; Kühnel, 1971; Pinder-Wilson and Brooke, 1973; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; *Art from the World of Islam*, 1987; Curatola, 1993; Goitein, 1967–93; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Phillips, 1995; Al-Ḥijjāwī, 1996; Allan, 2002.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Pinder-Wilson and Brooke, 1973; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Johns, 2002.

7 PROVENANCE: Khuzmalli Collection.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Monneret de Villard, 1950; Kühnel, 1971; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Ebitz, 1986; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996; Barrucand, 1999; Pinder-Wilson and Shalem, 2000; Johns, 2002; Metcalfe, 2002.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Kühnel, 1971; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Ebitz, 1986; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996; *Trésors fatimides*, 1998; Barrucand, 1999; Pinder-Wilson and Shalem, 2000.

9 PROVENANCE: Khuzmalli Collection.
PUBLISHED: A line drawing appears in *Mediaeval Design*, 1999, p. 104.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cott, 1939; Kühnel, 1971; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Ebitz, 1986; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Pinder-Wilson and Shalem, 2000; Johns, 2002.

10 PUBLISHED: Sotheby's, October 1998, lot 109; Rosser-Owen, 1999, pp. 21, 23, 29–30; Blair, 2001, p. 30; there are two articles forthcoming on this object, one by Antonio Fernández Puertas, in the journal *Miscelenea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, and Oliver Watson, [2004].
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Lévi-Provençal, 1931; Ferrandis, 1935; Terrasse, 1942; Beckwith, 1960; Kühnel, 1971; *Al-Andalus*, 1992; Shalem, 1995; Shalem, 1996; Prado-Vilar, 1997; Sotheby's, October 1998; Rosser-Owen, 1999; *Les Andalousies*, 2000; Blair, 2001; Rosser-Owen, 2002.

11 PROVENANCE: Humayzi Collection.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Wiet, 1930; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996; Burnett, 1999; Sotheby's, 2003.

12 PUBLISHED: Gray, 1974, cat. no. 148.
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Wiet, 1930; Gray, 1974; Jenkins, 1983; *Miniatures*, 1989; *Islamische Kunst*, 2000.

NOTES

1. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 'ʿĀdj'; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Ivory', §3, and 'Islamic Art', §VIII, 7.
2. See, for example, Idris, 1962.
3. Cutler, 1985, and Cutler, 1994.
4. On which, see Johns, 2002.
5. Rosser-Owen, 2002, chapter 4, part 1, 'The ʿAmirid Dār al-Sināʿa'.
6. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Ivory', §1.
7. Cf. Qatar Museum, no. MW.125.99, on which see Allan, 2002, pp. 50–1.
8. For the ivories from al-Andalus, see Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 19–47.
9. Cott, 1939; Monneret de Villard, 1950; Gabrieli and Scerrato, 1979; Curatola, 1993; *L'Età Normanna*, 1994; Shalem, 1995; Johns, 2002.
10. As on the caskets in the Cathedral Treasury in Marseilles (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, p.. 64b) and in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, plate 65b).
11. As on the Gemeentemuseum casket (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 65a), and on caskets in Mallorca (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 66b) and Berlin (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 67b).
12. As on the Mallorca casket (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 66b) and that in Fitero (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 72b).
13. See especially: *Al-Andalus*, 1992, nos 3, 4, 7, 10, 15, 20, 21, 40, 43, 49; *Trésors fatimides*, 1998, nos 1–4, 6, 27, 35, 38, 81, 83, 202; *Les Andalousies*, 2000, nos 136a–c.
14. Such as the caskets in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 66a), and the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 84b).
15. Cott, 1939.
16. Cutler, 1994; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Ivory', §3.
17. Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 28. The inscription reads, 'The sight I offer is the fairest, the firm breast of a delicate girl. Beauty has invested me with splendid raiment, which makes a display of jewels. I am a receptacle for musk, camphor and ambergris.'
18. For the importance of perfumes in Andalusī society, see *Al-Andalus*, 1992, pp. 42–3.
19. *Crónica*, 1981, pp. 264–5, §§238–9.
20. Personal communication from Professor Robert Hillenbrand.
21. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Chess Set'; Al-Ḥijjāwī, 1996.
22. Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 1–5.
23. Creswell, 1989, pp. 18–42; Johns, 2000.
24. Creswell, 1989, pp. 201–8; *Museum für Islamische Kunst*, 2001, pp. 117–25.
25. Creswell, 1989, pp. 331–44, 374–6.
26. An extremely rare pair of wooden doors survives from an eighth-century tomb near Baghdad (now in the Benaki Museum in Athens). It does not have applied decoration in ivory, but features large roundels carved into the fabric of the wood itself, with vine-scroll motifs similar to these ivory panels. See Piotrovsky and Vrieze, 1999, p. 153, cat. no. 105.
27. The material used may be lac, a dark red resinous incrustation deposited on trees by the lac insect: see Al-Hassan and Hill, 1986, pp. 173–4, on pigments. However, we cannot know for certain until such time as the composition of this inlay is established through scientific analysis.
28. My thanks to Kirsty Norman for studying this inlay and sharing her thoughts on it with me.
29. Cott, 1939; Pinder-Wilson, 1973.
30. There are four chess pieces of this type in the British Museum (three kings or queens, and one knight: Dalton, 1909, nos 225–8, pl. 48; Contadini, 1995,

p. 141, fig. 47; Phillips, 1995, pp. 582–3, cat. no. 7.49); one king in Berlin (Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 9; *Museum für Islamische Kunst*, 2001, p. 39); one bishop in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 10; Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 84); one knight in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 10a); and a couple of smaller pieces with related decoration in the Louvre (knight: Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 11) and the Metropolitan Museum (bishop or rook: Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 13). A knight similar to the piece in the Louvre was also recently sold at Christie's (2003, lot 52).

31. Jenkins, 1983, p. 60; Contadini, 1995, p. 133, fig. 43.
32. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, p. 295.
33. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pp. 286, 295, pls 80, 81a.
34. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pp. 285–6, pl. 79b; Curatola, 1993, p. 200, cat. no. 89.
35. Cott, 1939; Pinder-Wilson, 1973.
36. Phillips, 1995, p. 583. My thanks to Venetia Porter for arranging for me to study these pieces.
37. Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 9–13; Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pp. 295–6, pl. 84a; Contadini, 1995, p. 141, fig. 47; Phillips, 1995, pp. 582–3, cat. no. 7.49.
38. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Chess Set'.
39. Al-Ḥijjāwī, 1996, pp. 235–6, §390.
40. Contadini, 1995, figs 43–5.
41. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Chess Set'.
42. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, p. 296.
43. Cott, 1939; Pinder-Wilson, 1973, p. 272.
44. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pp. 267–72, for the description of the Reliquary of St Petroc, which is the largest in the group of rectangular caskets with pyramidal lids.
45. Nearly all of the two hundred extant ivories attributed to Sicily have the same type of mounts, and these are also seen on the metalwork casket in the Qatar Museum collection (MW.125.99), which can be attributed to medieval Sicily on the basis of its comparison to the ivories: see *Art from the World of Islam*, 1987, p. 84, no. 80, and Allan, 2002, pp. 50–1.
46. Monneret de Villard, 1950.
47. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, p. 279 (his Group I.I).
48. Caskets and chests in ivory or with ivory decoration are mentioned among *trousseau* lists in the Cairo Geniza documents, as compiled by Goitein, 1967–93, vol. 4.
49. On this period, see Johns, 2002.
50. Cott, 1939.
51. On the Salzburg pyxis, see Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pls 62, 75. Similar caskets are in the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 84b); the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (acc. no. 425-1906); the Cloisters, New York (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 71); and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pl. 77b).
52. Pinder-Wilson, 1973, pp. 296, 298–301.
53. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Oliphant'; Pinder-Wilson and Shalem, 2000, p. 80.
54. Ebitz, 1986, p. 310.
55. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Oliphant'.
56. Johns, 2002; Metcalfe, 2002.
57. Cott, 1939.
58. Monneret de Villard, 1950.
59. On the 'Saracenic' group, see Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 82–7; Ebitz, 1986; *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Oliphant'; Pinder-Wilson and Shalem, 2000.
60. See, for example, the comparison in Ebitz, 1986, figs 50 and 51, of a lustre bowl with a harpy from the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, with a harpy medallion on the carved oliphant in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

61. See Kühnel, 1971, pl. 84a, for the camel-herder scene on the southern Italian casket from the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin; compare with the Benaki bowl in *Trésors fatimides*, 1998, cat. no. 36.
62. Ebitz, 1986, pp. 314–15.
63. Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 86, pl. 91, and p. 67 for the discussion.
64. On the 'Saracenic' group, see Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 82–7.
65. Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 59 (Walters Art Gallery, inv. no. 71.234) and 65 (British Museum, inv. no. 1923.12-5.3).
66. See Ferrandis, 1935; Kühnel, 1971, cat. nos 19–47.
67. Blair, 2001; Fernández Puertas, in *Miscelanea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, forthcoming.
68. For example, the inscription on the surviving panels of the Zīrid/ᶜĀmirid *minbar* from the Andalusiyyīn Mosque in Fez includes the month (Jumāda II) in its date (Terrasse, 1942, pp. 5–6, 34–52), as does the *minbar* from the Qarawiyyīn Mosque (also Fez, and also Jumāda II), though this is no longer extant and the inscription is only known via its transmission in historical texts (Lévi-Provençal, 1931, p. 196, no. 221). The ᶜAmirid marble basin now in the Museo Nacional del Arte Hispanomusulmán, Granada, features the month Shawwal in its inscription, though this was recarved in 1305 under Naṣrid patronage (cf. Lévi-Provençal, 1931, pp. 195–6, no. 220).
69. Sotheby's, October 1998, p. 76.
70. Fernández Puertas, in *Miscelanea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, forthcoming.
71. Rosser-Owen, 2002; Watson, [2004].
72. For example, the 'Davillier' casket in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, whose inscription dates its production to 357 AH / 966 AD, but otherwise consists of a string of blessings '*li-ṣāḥibihi*': see Kühnel, 1971, cat. no. 33.
73. Burnett and Contadini, 1999, p. 87.
74. *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, 'Intarsia'; 'Marquetry'.
75. Sotheby's, 2003, lot 47.
76. Victoria & Albert Museum, no. 7849-1861.
77. Wiet, 1930, p. 47, inv. no. 138.
78. Wiet, 1930, p. 46, inv. no. 139. This *kursī*, which is inlaid with gold and silver, is covered with epigraphic decoration which repeats the name of the Mamlūk Sulṭān al-Malik al-Nāsir Muḥammad ibn Qalawūn, whose three reigns were 1294–1295, 1299–1309 and 1310–1340 AD.
79. Gray, 1974, cat. no. 148; Wiet, 1930, p. 46, inv. no. 139.
80. Jenkins, 1983, p. 89, who published only LNS41, as the second table was acquired after the publication of her catalogue.
81. *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, 1989, cat. no. 6, p. 78.
82. *Islamische Kunst*, 2000, cat. no. I15. My thanks to Sue Kaoukji, of the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyyah, for sharing with me their comparative material on the two tables in their collection.

ʿAbbāsids The dynasty that usurped the caliphate of Islam from the Umayyads in a revolution in 750. They transferred their power base from Damascus, in the Levant, to the heartland of the ancient Persian dynasty, the Sasanians. They constructed their own capital, Baghdad, near the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon, and later built a second huge palace-city at Samarra, which was only briefly occupied. The ʿAbbāsids remained in power, though they became increasingly weak rulers, until the conquest of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258.

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III One of the greatest rulers of al-Andalus, and the first of them to claim the title 'caliph', in direct opposition to the Fāṭimids of Egypt. Though he came to power in 912, he did not take the title of caliph until 929, and it is after this date that he embarked on his greatest reforms and constructions. He died in 961 and was succeeded by his son al-Ḥakam.

al-Andalus The name used to designate the area of the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule. The extent of this region fluctuated during the period of Islamic rule, which began with the conquest in 711 and lasted until the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492, by which time only the small area under the rule of the Naṣrid dynasty remained under Islamic rule.

al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalawūn The third son of the fifth and eminent Mamlūk sultan of Egypt and Syria, Qalawūn (1279–1290); he came to the throne three times, in 1293 (until 1294), 1299 (until 1309) and finally in 1310 for a long reign until 1341.

Amalfi A powerful maritime state on the south-west coast of Italy, which maintained trade links with Fāṭimid Egypt during the medieval period.

ʿĀmirids The name given to the regency dynasty that governed al-Andalus after the death of al-Ḥakam II in 976, since his son Hishām II came to power at the age of eleven. The most famous of this dynasty was al-Manṣūr, who ruled as caliph in all but name until his death in 1002, after which he was succeeded by his sons, ʿAbd al-Malik and ʿAbd al-Rahmān.

Andalusī The adjective used to refer to something from al-Andalus.

arabesque An old-fashioned term used to designate the decorative feature of an intricately scrolling palmette which is very common in Islamic art of all places and periods.

Bābur-nāme The autobiography of Bābur, first of the Mughal rulers in India, who came to power in 1494 and died in 1530 having conquered Hindustān.

basmala The word used to designate the short prayer that begins every sūra of the Qur'ān, and which consists of the phrase '*bismillāh al-raḥmān al-rahīm*', 'In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate'.

Byzantine Empire The region comprising south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor which was the eastern wing of the Roman Empire. After Rome itself fell to Germanic invaders in 476 AD, the capital shifted to Constantinople, a city originally called Byzantium, which had been rebuilt by Constantine the Great in 324–330 AD, and renamed after him. Byzantium in the West and the Sasanian world in the East were the main superpowers of the late antique period (circa 284 -632 AD), and also the main sources of artistic and cultural influence on the nascent Islamic states. Though Byzantine influence in the Levant decreased after the Arab conquests, Constantinople itself did not fall to the Muslims until the Ottoman period, in 1453, when it was renamed Istanbul.

Cappella Palatina The palace chapel in Palermo, Sicily, founded by Roger II (1130–1154), and decorated in a mixture of Islamic and Byzantine styles. The vaulted wooden ceiling is covered with painted decoration in an Islamic style and features many elements from Islamic iconography, and may indeed have been the work of Muslim craftsmen.

crosier A hooked staff carried by a bishop as a symbol of office.

Dome of the Rock The earliest surviving Islamic monument, built in 692 by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and richly adorned with mosaic decoration in the style of Byzantine churches in the region.

Fāṭimids The Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī dynasty, which arose in central North Africa in the early tenth century and adopted the title of caliph in direct opposition to the ʿAbbāsids of Iraq. They conquered Egypt in 969 and built a new capital called 'al Qāhira', 'the Victorious' (now known as Cairo). They were active patrons of the luxury arts, of which comparatively many survive, including many examples of lustre pottery. The art of the Fāṭimids was especially influential on the Normans of Sicily and southern Italy.

fil The Arabic word for 'elephant', which is the form used to represent the 'bishop' in the Islamic game of chess.

intarsia A term deriving from a type of inlaid furniture made in fifteenth-century Italy, which is also used to refer to a form of marquetry. A pattern or design is assembled from small, shaped pieces of wooden veneer, which are either slotted together with other pieces of veneer like a jigsaw puzzle (marquetry) or inset into a solid ground (inlay/intarsia).

Jawsaq al-Khaqānī The name of the first and largest of the ʿAbbasid caliphal palaces to be built at Samarra, after 836. It was elaborately ornamented with figural wall paintings and a new form of carved stucco wall decoration, which became increasingly abstract during the various building phases at the palace-city.

Kūfic script The name given to the first type of Arabic calligraphic script, in which many of the earliest surviving Qur'āns were written. It is also used to designate the form of epigraphic script common in al-Andalus until the twelfth century. It is a rather abstract and geometrical form of lettering, born from a different aesthetic than cursive script, which evolved later.

kursi A type of tall cabinet used for the storage of Qur'ānic manuscripts.

Levant The term used to designate the region that occupies the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, comprising present-day Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, along with islands and neighbouring countries.

Madīnat al-Zahrā' The palace-city constructed 3 kilometres outside Córdoba by the first Spanish-Umayyad Caliph, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (912–961). Construction began in 936, and continued throughout his reign, under the auspices of his son and heir, al-Hakam II (961–976). Madīnat al-Zahrā' and Córdoba formed a 'twin capital' for al-Andalus, and there was a spectacular palace here from which the caliphs governed as often as they did from the palace in Córdoba.

Maghreb The term used to designate the region that covers present-day Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, but which in medieval times referred to the Islamic West, including al-Andalus.

Mamlūk The sultanate or régime established and maintained by emancipated slaves of Turkish origin in Egypt (1250–1517), and in Syria (1260–1516).

Mediterranean

classical The term used to designate the period in ancient history during which the Mediterranean was part of the cultural world of first, the Greeks (sixth to fourth century BC) and secondly, the Romans (first century BC to third century AD).

late antique Refers to the period 284–632 AD, starting with the accession of the Emperor Diocletian, who effectively founded the Byzantine Empire, and closing with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, after which the success of the Arab conquests changed the balance of power in the Mediterranean.

Islamic Refers to the period after the Arab conquests. In the Mediterranean, these took place between 645 and 670 AD for North Africa, and 711–750 AD for the Iberian Peninsula.

Mshatta Umayyad palace, in present-day Jordan, constructed circa 744.

Mughals A Muslim dynasty descended from the Persian Tīmūrids, which ruled in India from 1526 to 1858.

Naṣrids The name given to the last Muslim dynasty to rule in al-Andalus, from 1230 to 1492, when they were defeated by the 'Catholic Kings', Ferdinand and Isabella. They claimed descent from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, whose throne-name was al-Nāṣir ('the Victor'). They governed Granada and the neighbouring areas, and were the sponsors of a 'renaissance' of art in al-Andalus, most famously the construction of the palace-complex of the Alhambra.

Normans A people of northern European origin who settled in Normandy in the tenth century and became the dominant military power in western Europe in the eleventh century. They conquered England in 1066, and took Sicily and southern Italy from Muslim rule at the end of the eleventh century, uniting them under their rule until 1266. Roger II (1130–1154) and his descendants maintained close ties with the rulers of Fāṭimid Egypt and engaged in architectural and artistic patronage which was strongly influenced by an Islamicizing aesthetic.

oliphant The name given to a hunting horn formed from a whole elephant's tusk. These were made throughout western Europe, including Byzantium, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but those whose production has been attributed to Sicily and southern Italy are most well-known.

pyxis (pl. pyxides) Derives from 'pyx', an ecclesiastical term used to describe the often small, cylindrical vessels in which the consecrated bread of the Eucharist was stored.

Reliquary of St Petroc The largest of the painted ivory caskets made in Norman Sicily, which came to England circa 1176–77, probably as a marriage gift when Joan, the daughter of King Henry II (1154–1189), married William II of Sicily. It was later used as a casket to hold the holy bones of St Petroc, and was kept in the parish church of that saint in Bodmin (Cornwall).

Roger II One of the greatest Norman kings of Sicily. He was crowned king on Christmas Day 1130, and thereafter embarked on a series of ambitious architectural constructions, including the Cappella Palatina (see above), which were strongly influenced by the art of Fāṭimid Egypt, via Roger's political and diplomatic contacts with those states. He died in 1154.

Samarra One of the palace-cities of the ʿAbbāsids, founded in 836 by the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim, 125 kilometres north of Baghdad along the banks of the Tigris. It was one of the largest cities of ancient times, and many huge monuments were constructed there, including palaces, mosques with their

characteristic helicoidal minarets, and huge army barracks. However, it was so large that it was difficult to govern, and in 892 the ʿAbbāsid rulers shifted their capital back to Baghdad.

Saracenic The term used by the German scholar Ernst Kühnel (1882–1964) to described a group of carved ivories the designs of which were influenced by Islamic art, though they were actually made outside of an Islamic environment. It was also a term used in nineteenth-century art history to describe objects made by Muslim craftsmen.

Sasanians The successors to the Parthians as rulers of ancient Persia, 224–642 AD. Together with the Byzantines in the West, the Sasanians were the main superpower of the late antique period, as well as one of the main sources of influence on early Islamic art. Political weaknesses in the early seventh century made them vulnerable to defeat by the Arab forces, and they were conquered in 642.

Tūlūnid The dynasty that governed the province of Egypt on behalf of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs from 868 to 905, but became increasingly independent of ʿAbbāsid rule. However, the restoration of direct ʿAbbāsid control in Egypt only lasted until the Fāṭimid invasion in 969.

Umayyads The first caliphal dynasty of Islam, descended from Umayya ibn ʿAbd Shams, a pre-Islamic notable of the tribe of Quraysh of Mecca (the same tribe to which the Prophet Muḥammad belonged). Between 661 and 750, from their centre in Syria the Umayyads ruled all the territories conquered by Islam. In 750, however, the ʿAbbāsids usurped the caliphate in a bloody revolution, and few of the Umayyads survived. One of the survivors, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, fled to North Africa and eventually to al-Andalus, where he re-established Umayyad rule.

Venice A maritime city-state in north-east Italy, which was a powerful republic in the medieval period and a leading sea power between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, controlling trade to the Levant and ruling parts of the eastern Mediterranean.

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